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ABSTRACT

Adult Learning in Australia (ALA), the lead organization in the field of adult learning in Australia and the national organization for adult learners in Australia, reviewed the current state of lifelong learning in Australia and identified why and how Australian policymakers should develop and finance a national strategy for lifelong learning. The following are among the recommendations that ALA issued to policymakers based on its review: (1) convene a national summit on lifelong learning to develop a national policy on lifelong learning; (2) recognize the leading role that Adult Learners Week can play as a sustained national promotion of lifelong learning and increase government support for the week; (3) fund a national State of Learning survey to monitor progress toward increasing participation in lifelong learning; (4) establish a Community Adult Learning Innovation Fund aimed at widening participation in learning and supporting innovative community-based education and learning; (5) examine ways of better coordinating expenditures on the education of Australian citizens and make use of existing providers of adult and community education (ACE); and (6) amend goods and services tax (GST) legislation so that government-recognized not-for-profit ACE organizations are treated like other educational institutions in relation to the GST on course fees. (Contains 10 endnotes.) (MN)



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# Lifelong Learning

## Investing in a Better Society

### Policy and funding proposals

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# Lifelong Learning

## Investing in a Better Society

Policy and funding proposals

Adult Learning
Australia Inc.

# Adult Learning Australia

This submission is prepared and presented by Adult Learning Australia (ALA) the peak organisation in the field of adult learning in Australia and the national organisation for adult learners. ALA has individual and organisational members; branches in every State and Territory; a national office in Canberra; a democratic membership structure governed by a popularly elected President and Executive. ALA represents Australia internationally as a member of the Asia South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE) and the International Council of Adult Education (ICAE).

In 1999 the Australian Association of Adult and Community Education adopted a new name – Adult Learning Australia (ALA) – to reflect the changing nature of education and learning and to make clear our orientation to the needs of adult learners before that of educational institutions.

The Association's core membership is from the ACE (adult and community education) sector, but we also have organisational and individual members from a much wider domain – corrections education, labour market training providers, university and VET institutions, churches, health centres, and so on. Our concerns therefore encompass, but also extend beyond the ACE sector as such.

Today ALA combines the roles of national peak body for adult and community education (ACE) and national advocacy body for adult learners and lifelong learning.

The latter role has been most clearly expressed in our initiation and leadership of Adult Learners Week in Australia. We believe this should continue to develop into a vigorous and sustained promotion of lifelong learning. We have also become active advocates of the diversity of adult learning including in areas such as 'Third Age learning', Learning Communities, informal learning circles, civics, reconciliation, environmental and popular education.

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February 2001

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# List of acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| AAACE | Australian Association of Adult & Community Education, now Adult Learning Australia (ALA) |
| AACI | Australian Chamber of Commerce & Industry |
| ABS | Australian Bureau of Statistics |
| ACE | Adult & Community Education |
| ACTU | Australian Council of Trade Unions |
| ALA | Adult Learning Australia |
| ALW | Adult Learners Week |
| ANOLC | Australian Network of Learning Communities |
| ANTA | Australian National Training Authority |
| ASPBAE | Asia & South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education |
| ATO | Australian Taxation Office |
| AVETMISS | Australian Vocational Education & Training Management Information Statistical Standard |
| CALIF | Community Adult Learning Innovation Fund |
| DETYA | Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs |
| EDP | Employee Development Program |
| FBT | Fringe Benefits Tax |
| GST | Goods and Services Tax |
| ICAE | International Council of Adult Education |
| NALL | New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (Canada) |
| NCVER | National Centre for Vocational Education & Research |
| PSM | Population Statistics Monitor |
| U3A | University of the Third Age |

# Executive summary

## 1. National lifelong learning policy framework

### 1.1 Lifelong Learning Policy

#### Recommendations

That the Government convene a national summit on lifelong learning inviting broad participation with the intention of developing a national policy on lifelong learning.

That the Government establish a bureau or agency with the purpose of making operational the national policy framework on lifelong learning.

That a proportion of ANTA funds be set aside for the provision of non-accredited adult and community education programs, in recognition of the importance of lifelong learning.

### 1.2 Adult Learners Week

#### Recommendation

That the Government recognise the leading role Adult Learners Week can play as a sustained national promotion of lifelong learning by integrating it within a Lifelong Learning Initiative and increasing Government support for the Week.

#### Cost

$1.5 million for the three-year period 2002–2004.

### 1.3 State of Learning Report – a national survey of adult learning

#### Recommendation

That the Government fund an annual national 'State of Learning' survey to monitor progress towards increasing participation in lifelong learning.

#### Cost

$150 000 for three years ($50 000 per year).

# 2. Community-based adult learning innovation

## 2.1 Community Adult Learning Innovation Fund

### Recommendation

That the Government establish a Community Adult Learning Innovation Fund aimed at widening participation in learning and supporting innovative community-based education and learning.

### Cost

$12 million over three years 2001–2004.

## 2.2 Australian Network of Learning Communities

### Recommendation

That the Government foster an Australian Network of Learning Communities to inform, encourage and support, the establishment and spread of 'Learning Communities'.

### Cost

$4.875 million over three years, with contributions from relevant city authorities.

## 2.3 Citizen education through Learning Circles

### Recommendation

That the Government, as an integral element of its Lifelong Learning Initiative, examine ways in which its own expenditures on the education of citizens concerning important issues on the public policy agenda, be better coordinated, and make use of existing providers of adult and community education.

### Cost

$1 million over 3 years to support establishing a national clearing house and resource centre for Learning Circles, establish ongoing partnerships with community organisations, government, the professional and scientific communities aimed at producing Learning Circle kits on topics of civic importance as determined by an independent Management Board.

## 2.4 Employee Development Programs

### Recommendations

That the Government recognise the value of Employee Development Programs as a means of both bringing more adults into active learning, and improving productive efficiency at work.

That there be a review of FBT in relation to such schemes.

### Cost

Allocation of $1.2 million over two years for Employee Development Program information, coordination, and start-up support. Interested companies to commit matching funds.

# 3. Taxation and adult learning

## 3.1 Review of taxation and learning

### Recommendation

That the Government commission a Review of the way in which the taxation system impacts on learning, and how it might be used to encourage learning.

## 3.2 Removing the GST on learning in ACE

### Recommendation

That the Government amend its GST legislation so that not-for-profit ACE organisations recognised by State and Territory governments are treated in the same manner as other educational institutions in relation to the GST on course fees.

### Cost

It is estimated that exempting courses offered by not-for-profit ACE organisations recognised by State and Territory governments from the GST would cost around $2 million.

# Conclusion

Adult Learning Australia estimates that the total cost of these proposals would be approximately $22.725 million over three years. In the context of the national budget for education and learning these are very modest proposals.

Initiatives requiring funding could be introduced in the May 2001 budget. The policy proposals could be announced without delay so that work could commence during 2001.

# Why now is the time for a lead on lifelong learning

'Learning' is at the centre of discourse in education and increasingly beyond what has been traditionally understood as education. It is now commonplace to hear and talk about, not education or training, but learning – lifelong learning, learning organisations, open and flexible learning, learning cities and communities, a learning society, a learning culture, the learning age.

The conditions that have given rise to the current interest in lifelong learning contain within them both constraints and opportunities. We are all familiar with some of these conditions:

- accelerating change in many dimensions of life from work to family to sport,
- changing identities, loyalties and aspirations,
- greater focus on lifestyle and consumption,
- the growing importance of information and communications technologies,
- the growing role of information and knowledge in many arenas of economic, social, political and working life,
- increasing variety of popular culture, and
- the emergence of new agendas in politics regarding race and gender equality, disability rights, the environment.

These conditions are accompanied by:

- a widening of social divisions in income, employment, health, education and access to information,
- divisions between city and country, and
- evidence of growing social exclusion, despair and hopelessness resulting from multiple deprivations. The statistics on depression and suicide present a stark expression of this.

Unfortunately many of those who could most benefit from lifelong learning in dealing with social change are currently excluded from or unaware of its possibilities and often lack the self-confidence or opportunity to get involved.

Last year the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) undertook a large-scale piece of research on Australians' attitudes to education and learning. Four broad groups emerged from the research. It showed that around 30 per cent of Australian adults will continue to participate in organised or structured learning throughout their lives. At the other end of the scale, 21 per cent of adults won't go anywhere near education once they've left school. In the middle are those who participate if they feel they have to (for work) or might like to but can't for one reason for another (family, distance, costs).[1]

The research told us that existing education and training systems do not adequately meet the learning needs of adults. While the words 'education', 'training', and 'study' are turn-offs for many, the word 'learning' is a turn-on as it is associated with the positive concepts of 'discovery', enjoyment and working

with others. Australian adults are clear about what they like and want for their post-school learning. The challenge for policy makers and educators, therefore, is to develop a new learning ecology that responds to these needs and is relevant at the beginning of the 21st century.

We also know that 34 per cent of Australian adults do not have the minimum literacy and numeracy skills that would enable them to cope with the complex demands of civic life and employment[2]. And three out of every ten school students do not currently complete Year 12.

What these figures point to is a serious learning divide. Were such a divide to continue or widen, those individuals and their families will be at a great disadvantage. But this divide also holds serious consequences for the wider Australian society.

Collectively, Australians at the beginning of the 21st century are crying out for learning as a means of:

- *making sense of change* – information, ideas, knowledge, concepts, theories and a critical mind,
- *adapting to change* – maximising benefits and minimising costs, making the most of change, and
- *shaping change* – as authors of change rather than its victims.[3]

Now is the time to make clear the Government's commitment to redressing the learning divide and to commit to a national strategy for lifelong learning.

## Increasing participation

We continue to press for widening participation in adult education and learning for two reasons. Firstly, because education for all is a democratic right. Secondly, because the general well-being of the society needs an educated, informed population to respond to economic, social, and technological change.

A learning society is mutually beneficial. Accomplished adult learners are more likely to: support their children's learning; be aware of and attend to their own health and well being; be optimistic and purposeful in facing the future; readily acquire new knowledge and skills when required; be interested and involved in local affairs; and be sceptical of dogmatic and simplistic solutions to difficult social issues.

To be a clever country we must do more than acquire new employment skills. We must also learn to facilitate informed discussion on key issues that often seem intractable. Issues such as gene technology, reconciliation, salinity, safer communities, national identity, drug use, gambling, an ageing society, would benefit from informed discussion which in turn would strengthen our civil society and help resolve some of these national discussions.

To successfully implement a strategy for lifelong learning, we need to increase demand for learning, widen participation, and diversify forms of provision. In short, we need a systematic cultural change. In recognition that there is no one best way to learn, we need to support a variety of different learning cultures. Widening participation requires new resources and strategies to support non-participants in acquiring the confidence and capacity to learn independently.

## A framework for partnership and ownership

Governments have the principal responsibility of leading and securing support from influential and strategic partners to create a learning society. But educational institutions, employers, trade unions, national representative bodies, community organisations and others must be enabled to share responsibility for this broad-ranging and significant project. Governments must learn from and work with organisations and individuals with proven success in this area.

A number of non-traditional learning initiatives are being pioneered by communities, non-government organisations and business. Some state governments are showing leadership through innovative programs (the Learning Towns program in Victoria, for instance) but at a national level Australia is being left behind when compared to other similar countries in our region and in Europe.

In Australia there are separate national policies on higher, school, vocational and community education. But nothing integrates these areas and as a result national policy remains fragmented and incomplete. There is neither a national framework nor a national policy statement outlining the Government's general commitment to lifelong learning.

ALA believes the Commonwealth should take the lead in coordinating a national response for a learning society. Three steps are necessary. Firstly the government should convene a national lifelong learning summit that would bring together relevant industry, education, government agencies and community organisations. Secondly, this summit should be structured so as to generate a national policy framework. Finally, we believe that the Government should indicate its commitment to such a process by way of a major statement of support from the Prime Minister or Minister for Education, and ideally, this support should be confirmed with the appointment of a Minister for Lifelong Learning.

In the 21st century, our challenge is to extend learning opportunities, to recognise and support new forms of learning, and to make learning integral to the lives of Australians. In other words, it is to make learning normal.

## Adult learning in Australia

In Australia, adult learning is a dynamic environment because of the numerous sites and types of learning in which adults participate and the diverse arrangements across States and Territories. In addition, one of the enduring strengths of this form of education is its accessible nature and its ability to change to meet new learning needs.

The scope of education activity conducted by universities and TAFEs is well understood. In addition to these providers there is a wide range of organisations providing adult and community education across Australia. It is difficult to arrive at a precise number of not-for-profit ACE organisations in Australia, but they number in excess of 1000. Each operates under different conditions and circumstances and each State has a different system of organising and supporting ACE activity.

In 1998:

- Approximately 1.4 million adults attended a community-based adult education course,[4]
- 582 000 adults enrolled in a course at one of the 1000 ACE (Adult and Community Education) centres in Australia, in courses totalling 21 million hours, and
- another 725 000 adults attended a non-formal course at a community-based organisation not registered in the official education and training statistical collection[5]

ACE organisations that are Registered Training Organisations are eligible to access ANTA funds for accredited education and training provision. However, there is only minimal support at a national level for community-based adult learning. In 2000–2001 the ACE National Program, administered by ANTA, is only $750 000 and is divided between support for Adult Learners Week; a research program; and support for the national industry body, ALA.

This commitment represents less than 0.001 per cent of the Commonwealth funds provided to the National Training Authority.[6]

There is no specific funding for non-accredited education or ACE provision by the Commonwealth. Currently, funds provided by the Commonwealth through ANTA can be used only for accredited vocational courses or vocational preparation courses delivered by TAFE or private providers. ALA believes that a proportion of ANTA funds should be set aside for the provision of non-accredited adult and community education programs, in recognition of the importance of lifelong learning.

There is a pressing need for the national government to show its support for community-based adult learning. Many innovative learning partnerships have been formed by community organisations in recent years, ranging from Learning Circles to Learning Communities. The opportunity is there for the Commonwealth to demonstrate its commitment and support for these and other initiatives, which are set out in section 2.

## This submission

This submission comprises three parts. They are:

- 'National lifelong learning policy framework',
- 'Community-based adult learning innovation', and
- 'Taxation and adult learning'.

While they are presented in three parts they are interconnected elements of a broader Lifelong Learning initiative.

The first section – 'National lifelong learning policy framework' – seeks a firm commitment from the Government to develop a national policy on Lifelong Learning. It includes a specific set of three recommendations.

The second section – 'Community-based adult learning innovation' – proposes that five areas of innovative adult education and learning practice be supported by the Commonwealth.

The third section – 'Taxation and adult learning' – recommends that the Government consider using the taxation system as an incentive to facilitate learning. It also recommends that courses conducted by not-for-profit ACE organisations be exempted from the GST, thus removing a disincentive to learning and an uneconomic burden on community-based adult learning organisations.

In the context of overall expenditures on post-secondary education and training, none of these initiatives are in themselves expensive, and they could in significant respects be mutually reinforcing.

# 1. National lifelong learning policy framework

## 1.1 Lifelong Learning Policy

Australia lags behind many comparable countries in terms of its attention to lifelong learning, at least at the national policy level. Statements promoting the importance of lifelong learning policy for economic development, individual satisfaction, social cohesion and for rural and urban renewal have been articulated by international bodies such as the European Union, OECD, and Group of 8, and by the UK, Singapore and Japanese national governments. The UK, Japan, Scotland, Ireland, Singapore and a number of European countries have established agencies or bureaus to implement these policies thereby moving them beyond rhetorical support. The British and Scottish governments have gone further by appointing Ministers for Lifelong Learning.

While there are detailed policies in Australia on the different sectors of education – universities, VET, ACE and schools – there is no integrating national policy that brings these sectors together, nor that creates an umbrella over the important education and learning contributions of industry and civil society organisations.

ALA was encouraged by the Government's response to the Senate Report *Beyond Cinderella* (1998) when it gave its 'unequivocal commitment to the concept of lifelong learning and the promotion of a learning society'. This commitment needed to be backed up by an effective strategy and funding programs. To date that hasn't occurred.

Since then there has been considerable support for a national policy on lifelong learning from other national associations; NGOs; and influential individuals. The 1999 Adult Learners Week national policy seminar on lifelong learning set out a number of practical proposals for developing a national policy framework in Australia.[7]

Australia needs a national policy framework for lifelong learning that integrates formal, non-formal and informal learning, and that recognises and attends to the issue of non-participation. This latter objective could be achieved by providing incentives and support for more members of this 'non-participant' group to take the first steps back into education and training, and thereby become active learners.

A national policy framework should incorporate at least the following:

- additional funding for growth and wider participation in post-school education,
- establishment of national targets to measure progress towards extended participation,
- creation of targeted learning accounts,
- establishment of regional and community lifelong learning partnerships for planning, research and resource allocation,

- targeted policies aimed at improving existing levels of functional literacy and numeracy among adults,
- a national strategy for rural, regional and neighbourhood regeneration,
- popular promotional campaigns for learning,
- recognition of the significant learning contributions of cultural institutions,
- new public library and community centre initiatives particularly aimed at extending the availability of Information Communication Technologies – 'Wired Communities', and
- online learning initiatives to take into account all levels of educational interest and ability.

In ALA's vision, shifts necessary for creating a learning society include:

- more inclusive types, meanings and purposes of learning,
- changes in demand such as increasing numbers participating, diversification of the learning population; and learning spread across all ages,
- more shared ownership and responsibility for learning,
- a significant increase in employers' commitment and support, and
- greater flexibility of learning opportunities through new locations and times, and styles and forms of delivery.

Accordingly, Adult Learning Australia encloses here a set of inter-connecting policy and program proposals for the stimulation and support of increased participation in adult learning. We propose that they be packaged into a three year Lifelong Learning Initiative. We believe the full set of proposals could be set in train with the 2001–2002 Federal Budget.

## Recommendations

That the Government convene a national summit on lifelong learning inviting broad participation with the intention of developing a national policy on lifelong learning.

That the Government establish a bureau or agency with the purpose of making operational the national policy framework on lifelong learning.

That a proportion of ANTA funds should be set aside for the provision of non-accredited adult and community education programs, in recognition of the importance of lifelong learning.

## 1.2 Adult Learners Week

Adult Learners Week (ALW) has been a flagship national campaign promoting lifelong learning in Australia since 1995. Since 1999 ALW has successfully brought in new partners to promote and support the idea. In the past two years the Week has enjoyed the public support of the Governor-General, Prime Minister, State Ministers, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Secretary, media and sporting figures, industry training bodies, museums and a wide range of educators.

The Week is becoming an umbrella event for diverse approaches to adult learning. Adult Learners Week can, however, play a much more significant role in the sustained promotion of lifelong learning. This will require Government to appreciate the advantages to be gained from embedding ALW in a broader set of lifelong learning initiatives, such as those outlined in this document.

A lack of funds constrains ALW from expanding beyond its current scale. Funding to manage and coordinate ALW has not risen since the first year of ALW in 1995. Significant additional costs involved in price increases over that period, combined with the broader scope of the Week, mean that ALW cannot achieve all its objectives.

ALW could become more deeply engaged with industry, with the broadcasting media, and with the vast range of civil society organisations involved with lifelong learning. There is also unexplored potential for engaging a range of government portfolios – such as Health and Environment – in support of such a 'festival' or 'celebration of learning'. Fostered in this way, ALW could develop strong links with Learning Cities, and with companies that have initiated Employee Development Programs. (See Section 2.4) It could also be the annual occasion for releasing the proposed 'State of Learning' report. (See Section 1.3)

Growing international support for the concept was demonstrated in 2000 when UNESCO endorsed a global ALW in association with International Literacy Day. Forty countries organised an ALW last year and, as a result of its experience, Australia is seen as playing a leading role in advising and assisting other countries in the Asia Pacific region.

Adult Learners Week has done very well in a short space of time. Serious Government commitment, increased three-year funding, and building on the wider stakeholder model could enable it to become a key catalyst in the further development of lifelong learning.

### Recommendation

The Government recognise the leading role Adult Learners Week can play as a sustained national promotion of lifelong learning by integrating it within a Lifelong Learning Initiative and increasing its support for the Week.

### Cost

$1.5 million for the three-year period 2002–2004.

## 1.3 State of Learning Report – a national survey of adult learning

No worthwhile data on participation in adult and community education was collected prior to 1990. Since then, various participation surveys have been conducted at both national and state levels. In addition, over the past few years enrolment data has been collected as part of AVETMISS.[8] Other useful benchmark data includes the ABS Population Survey Monitor, ABS Education and Training Statistics, ANTA's Marketing Strategy research and ALA's (then AAACE) *Who are Australia's adult learners?* (1995). But there is no systematic collection of the range of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Due to enormous disparities between the various jurisdictions, ACE does not report its activity in a uniform manner across Australia.

As policy focus shifts to lifelong learning, data on participation in learning activities of all kinds – including non-formal and informal learning – becomes crucial. Reliable data of this can only be obtained through interview surveys. The Canadian New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (NALL) provides an important model for undertaking such research.[9]

Establishing reliable information about adults' learning has the following benefits.

- It will inform policy by creating a picture of informal learning occurring in public health, agriculture, the environment, in the voluntary sector, about information technology, in the workplace and so on.
- It will assist in moving beyond reliance on anecdotal information.
- It will indicate how and where non-participant learners learn.
- It will assist in developing a needs analysis for public education.
- It can assist in accurate targeting of funds to meet learners' needs.
- It will provide a more reliable benchmark for measuring progress in redressing educational disadvantage.

The ABS Population Survey Monitor (PSM) is an ideal vehicle for the project. Trained PSM interviewers collect core socio-demographic data on a national random sample of some 3000 adults. $50 000 would be required to obtain a reasonable national picture of the 'state of learning' in Australia – showing who is involved in learning, what, why and where they are learning, and possibly, their attitude towards learning, and future intentions.

We propose that the commissioning and release of such a survey become a regular feature of Adult Learners Week.

### Recommendation

That the Government fund a national 'State of Learning' survey to monitor progress towards increasing participation in lifelong learning.

### Cost

$150 000 for three years ($50 000 per year).

# 2. Community-based adult learning innovation

In recent years big advances have been made in popularising learning in all its forms, making it more accessible and attractive to a wider range of people. However, too many people (21%) remain untouched or unconvinced by the message that learning is for everyone. More attention needs to be paid to break through the isolation and exclusion that often characterises these people's lives. In addition, too many young people leave their formal schooling before completing Year 12, thereby making further education less likely and creating considerable lifetime disadvantages in income, health and employment. Further, many adults (34%) do not have internationally recognised basic standards in literacy and numeracy.

In general, non-participants share some or all of the following characteristics. They:

- lack resources for course fees and related expenses,
- lack confidence as learners,
- require greater investment to attract them to education,
- require greater on-program support,
- require greater personal support (eg child care, benefit advice),
- may require programs organised at special times and places,
- may be more likely not to complete programs due to economic or social pressures, and
- may not progress or achieve qualifications at the same rate as others.

ALA believes that clearly targeted programs drawing on the experience and learner-oriented focus of community-based adult education organisations would begin to redress this situation.

Lifelong learning must be for the many, not just the few. This is a key equity measure in ensuring that all Australians participate actively in a learning society.

Creating a learning society means identifying and attending to the conditions that alert, encourage and support adults to take up learning, and enable them to make their own choices about what they learn and how. Making any significant impression on 'non-participants' requires focusing on them, not on providers.

Stimulating 'demand' is a major challenge and if it is to be met then support must be provided for community-based organisations likely to best provide the 'supply'.

The proposals that follow constitute excellent programs of innovation; community development; citizen education through Learning Circles; and Employee Development Programs.

## 2.1 Community Adult Learning Innovation Fund

The aim of the Community Adult Learning Innovation Fund (CALIF) would be to support community-based organisations to develop new learning opportunities for adults. It would aim to draw more people into learning – especially those who are wary of education or who have been discouraged from learning. The Fund would support activities that take learning into sectors of the community not reached by traditional educational organisations, providing opportunities that are relevant to people involved and delivering them in ways that will interest and attract those who are hardest to reach.

This Fund would provide a new way to invest in learning opportunities provided through local, community-based activities that are familiar and relevant to people's everyday lives.

Such a program would look to the community to develop solutions for the learning needs of their community. It would be a practical step in widening participation in the context of providing lifelong learning opportunities. It would also be an opportunity for the Commonwealth to provide national leadership in this area of education activity and to recognise community-based adult learning providers within the specific context of the Government's commitment to innovation.

It will be a means of harnessing and fostering the innovative learning techniques already developed by community-based providers in bringing into the education system those adults who do not generally participate.

The CALIF could offer community-based providers with up to three years funding for developing either small- or larger-scale projects with an emphasis on widening participation and strengthening the capacity of citizens to understand and adapt to this period of rapid economic, social and political change.

### Recommendation

That the Government establish a Community Adult Learning Innovation Fund aimed at widening participation in learning and supporting innovative community-based education and learning.

### Cost

$12 million over three years 2001–2004.

## 2.2 Australian Network of Learning Communities

There is growing interest in the concept of Learning Towns and Learning Cities as a means of both furthering lifelong learning opportunities for individuals and integrating economic and social development in communities in value-added ways.

Learning Towns and Cities have many advantages. They:

- foster collaborative learning partnerships (eg with industry and community bodies),
- make better use of resources,
- integrate economic, social and educational development, and
- foster social cohesion and an inclusive society.

This strategy is being promoted in Victoria and South Australia but to date has not received support outside of those states. Wodonga and Ballarat have declared themselves Learning Cities. Seven other regional cities in Victoria have received State funds to develop the Learning Town concept. The South Australian government is also supportive of the idea while cities in Tasmania (Launceston), NSW (Lithgow) and Queensland (Toowoomba) are also considering becoming Learning Communities.

The Learning Town/Learning City strategy would be especially relevant and valuable in Australia's rural and regional areas as a strategy for broad-fronted regeneration and revitalisation that brings all stakeholders together for joint action.

In October 2000 the first national Learning Cities conference was held in Albury-Wodonga. The conference agreed to hold a second conference in Ballarat in 2002 and to establish an electronic network for support, information exchange and advice. Adult Learning Australia accepted an invitation to host the electronic network. The conference was a demonstration of the emerging learning partnerships between education providers, local government, and local business and community associations.

A Commonwealth program to support a pilot phase of experiment and development, with perhaps 15 towns and cities across Australia, could offer grants of around $100 000 a location. This would provide for a coordinator and some resources and equipment. Local communities would also be invited to contribute (eg premises, human resources).

In order to develop expertise and exchange among the community projects and in order to develop resources promoting the concept and experience from across Australia a Network Resource Centre and Project Officer should be established for a three-year period.

### Recommendation

That the Government foster an Australian Network of Learning Communities (ANOLC) to inform, encourage and support, the establishment and spread of 'Learning Communities'.

### Cost

$4.875 million over three years, with contributions from relevant city authorities.

## 2.3 Citizen education through Learning Circles

The Commonwealth Government is a very large purchaser of citizen education. We estimate that around $200 million annually is allocated to various forms of citizen or community education. Greater efficiencies and effectiveness could be achieved by better coordination on a 'whole of government' basis.

ALA has successfully introduced to Australia Learning Circles, a. new method of citizen-directed learning. Learning Circle groups engage in informed discussion on contentious issues such as public health, gambling, genetically modified foods, drug usage, environmental sustainability, and reconciliation, avoiding simplistic solutions to complex social and economic problems. ALA has demonstrated that high quality materials to support Learning Circle groups can be produced in a very cost-effective way. Large numbers of people can be involved in a substantial educational experience, often leading to sustained commitment and community action. Such outcomes have been thoroughly documented in the case of our Learning Circle on Aboriginal Reconciliation.

In recent years Learning Circles Australia have developed learning circle materials on:

- Salinity in the Murray-Darling River,
- Civics and Democracy,
- Aboriginal Reconciliation,
- Living and Learning in the Third Age,
- Crime Prevention and Community Safety,
- Centenary of Federation Community Program, and
- Women in Action - Making a Difference.

ALA proposes that a small proportion of funds currently allocated to major Commonwealth public awareness/community education activities be assigned to the production and distribution of high quality, authoritative learning circle materials by an independent body such as Learning Circles Australia. A national clearing-house and resource centre for Learning Circles is necessary; along with the further development of strategic partnerships between industry, government and community organisations, in order to produce Learning Circle kits on topics of civic importance as determined by an independent Management Board.

### Recommendation

That the Government examine ways of better coordinating its expenditure on citizen education about important issues on the public policy agenda, and consider, in particular, maiking use of existing providers of adult and community education.

### Cost

$1 million over three years.

## 2.4 Employee Development Programs

Employee Development Programs (EDPs) have a ten-year history in the USA and the UK. The essential concept is that employers provide their workforce with a cash-limited learning entitlement that may be accessed to undertake learning of the individual's choice. Normally, job training is excluded. EDPs have been exceptionally successful in bringing significant numbers of relatively low-skilled and unqualified people back into learning. Companies involved report lower levels of absenteeism, sick leave and staff turnover, and greater responsiveness to training activities. Studies also indicate the EDP participants become more active in the community.[10]

ALA (then AAACE) strongly supported an EDP pilot program in Geelong, funded from the ACE National Grant Program. A report on the pilot was submitted to ANTA in 1998. In 1999 the South Australian Police Service launched an employee development scheme during Adult Learners Week.

In April 1998 Lend Lease initiated a scheme of this sort through the Lend Lease Foundation. Every Lend Lease employee in 1998 was granted a 'learning entitlement' that could be accessed to pay for the learning activity of his or her choice. Some 50 per cent of its workforce in Australia accessed the program.

ALA believes that the Government, perhaps through ANTA, might appropriately become a catalyst for the extension of learning opportunity of this type throughout the workforce. This would best be done in association with the ACCI, ACTU, and other major industry partners. A modest support program might include funding for production and distribution of information about EDPs and how to establish them, 'start-up' funding support for 12 companies in targeted regions and industries to help get the ball rolling, and program coordination and support through the appropriate Commonwealth agency.

As a separate matter, the issue of FBT alleviation for such schemes should be taken up with Treasury. (See Section 3)

### Recommendations

That the Government recognise the value of EDPs as a means of both bringing more adults into active learning, and improving productive efficiency at work.

That there be a review of FBT in relation to such schemes.

### Cost

Allocation of $1.2 million over two years for EDP information, coordination, and start-up support. Interested companies to commit matching funds.

# 3. Taxation and adult learning

## 3.1 Review of taxation and learning

Taxation has been used in Australia to encourage and support learning. The personal tax arrangements have made provision for those in the workforce to claim the costs of formal education courses provided by professional organisations, and self-education expenses related to courses provided by a school, college, university, or other institution that relate to the claimant's job.

The principle is a sound one. Individuals have an added incentive to invest in their own learning, and the community benefits from additions to human capital. Current practice, however, is very limited as the ATO only gives relief to direct work-related education expenses. There are few incentives in the tax system to encourage further learning, especially among those who find it hardest to participate and those most in need.

Accordingly, we would like the Government to conduct a review of the taxation system as it applies to lifelong learning. This review should address the following issues.

Firstly, how can the taxation system be used as an incentive for learning and in particular how could a targeted system of learning entitlements be implemented? Initiatives currentle being trialed in the other countries are worthy of examination. These include the UK's Individual Learning Accounts, and the USA's tax credits for post-secondary students (Hope Scholarships) and its Lifetime Learning tax credit.

A second issue that should be addressed in the taxation system is the GST on community education. GST is charged on approximately 40 per cent of adult and community education courses. It is a serious disincentive to participation, especially amongst the very groups that we would most like to reach. (See Section 3.2)

Thirdly, Treasury should consider initiating a positive incentive for the spread of Employee Development Schemes by abolishing FBT on them.

It may be that the taxation system has never been reviewed from the perspective of how it encourages or discourages learning activity. We strongly recommend such a review.

### Recommendation

That the Government commission a review of the way in which the taxation system impacts on learning, and how it might be used to encourage learning.

## 3.2 Removing the GST on learning in ACE

The government has made much of its claim that education is GST-free under the New Tax System. But this claim ignores the fact that ACE providers are required to levy the tax on around 40 per cent of their courses.

This is not only a tax on learning for those among the 582 000 adults who enrol in ACE in one of those taxed courses. It is also a burdensome requirement on the 1000 ACE centres that are required to spend more time and resources on collecting the tax than is remitted to the ATO.

In its submission to the Senate Inquiry on the New Tax System, DETYA confirmed ALA's estimate that the total likely revenue from ACE would be in the order of $5 million. As a result of the GST Amendment of 1999 and the subsequent ATO Ruling in June 2000 it is now estimated that some 40 per cent of courses are subject to the tax. This means that around $2 million is being collected by ACE providers. The cost of compliance outweighs this sum.

ALA believes that courses provided by not-for-profit ACE organisations recognised by State and Territory governments should have been excluded from the GST because all forms of structured learning contributes to the employment and life skills needed in a learning society. An amendment to the GST legislation to this effect would be prudent.

In the meantime, a new interpretation by the Government and the ATO of the ACE Amendment, that recognised all courses offered by ACE organisations are likely to add to the employment related skills of those enrolled, would remove an important barrier to learning. At the same time, it would remove a costly and inefficient administrative burden on ACE organisations.

### Recommendation

That the Government amend its GST legislation so that not-for-profit ACE organisations recognised by State and Territory governments are treated in the same manner as other educational institutions in relation to the GST on course fees.

### Cost

It is estimated that exempting courses offered by not-for-profit ACE organisations recognised by State and Territory governments from the GST would cost around $2 million.

# Endnotes

1 ANTA (2000) *National Marketing Strategy for Skills and Lifelong Learning*, http://www.anta.gov.au/lifelong/STRATEGY/Reports_Pubs.htm#Research.

2 ABS (1997) *Survey of Adult Literacy Levels*; OECD (1999) *Literacies for the Knowledge Society*, Second Report of the International Adult Literacy Survey, http://www.oecd.org/els/education/literacy.

3 Raymond Williams described these three ways that learning helps us negotiate change in a brochure of the United Kingdom Workers Educational Association.

4 ACE is a large-scale area of education activity for Australian adults. The project on the Scope of Adult and Community Education in Australia and Implications for Improved Data Collection and Reporting was commissioned by ANTA and carried out by NCVER in 2000.

Representing the 'national picture' of ACE is a challenging task for a number of reasons. ACE is primarily a State and Territory responsibility so funding varies across administrations as does definitions and the degree of research and data collection. As a result the majority of ACE activity in Victoria and NSW, and to a lesser extent South Australia, is captured in the national vocational education and training database. However ACE activity in other states and territories is not collected and reported on to the same degree.

Despite this the NCVER research on the Scope of ACE provides important information about Australian adults' participation in ACE.

NCVER reports that in 1998 the national VET database contained data on ACE activity undertaken by 582 000 adult participants, or 3.9% of Australia's 1998 population of age 15 years or more. In total, this ACE activity amounted to 21.2 million hours of organised learning in 1998.

These learners were enrolled with a community-based provider. NCVER acknowledged that these figures do not represent the entire ACE picture because of the different reporting requirements and mechanisms across States and Territories. Nor does it include the full extent of adult learning activity undertaken through organisations that are not part of any State or Territory funding, and therefore reporting, arrangements.

5 Such organisations include U3As, some community and neighbourhood centres, special interest associations (eg photography groups, physical and fitness groups, language and cultural associations such as Alliance Francaise; book clubs, environmental associations and so on).

6 See *Budget Paper No.1 2000–01* p. 6–30; and ANTA (2000) *Annual Report on Operations 1999–2000* p. 69.

7 These proposals are available in the ALA discussion paper (2000) edited and introduced by Tony Brown called *Lifelong Learning: Making it Work*.

8 An extensive research base on ACE has been established over the past decade. An analytical summary of this research – *A Consolidation of ACE Research 1990–2000* – has been completed for ANTA by Barry Golding, Merryn Davies and Veronica Volkoff, and is awaiting publication.

9 *Lifelong Learning Profiles: General Summary of Findings from the First Canadian Survey of Informal Learning*, 2000, http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/depts/sese/csew/nall/sur_res.htm.

10 The most systematic research into the broad, and initially unanticipated, benefits of Employee Development Programs has been carried out by Ford in the UK.